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DUIs affect everyone in community

By **MARK ALLEN**

Guest columnist

DUI costs much more than we think. Here's how you can help. We hear about costs of DUI in the media, but that always seems to be about someone else.

DUI can happen to anyone in our community, and it affects us all. As a member of the Gallatin County DUI Task Force I've been surprised to learn about DUI costs.

Some of that translates directly into dollars — a first offense DUI can cost you \$10,000 or more. But there are so many lesser known costs. Did you know that you may have trouble driving into Canada if you have a DUI conviction in your record?

A DUI affects your insurance rates for three to five years. The average is an additional \$1,500 a year above your normal

insurance rates. Some companies move you to a "high risk" pool or drop you all together.

It can ruin your chances for that job you want, or career you are working toward.

Impaired drivers put us all at risk. The DUI Task Force and other agencies spend thousands of dollars each year to finance DUI-emphasis law enforcement patrols. Response to DUI crashes often includes fire department and paramedic units along with law-enforcement, depleting community resources that could be used elsewhere.

Around two-thirds of DUI accidents are single-vehicle crashes. The other third involve other vehicles and community members like you or me. A completely preventable crime, the random nature of who is affected by impaired drivers is one of the most difficult to recover from for victims who survive.

To help stop DUI in our community,

first plan ahead if you will be celebrating this holiday season. How will you get safely home? It's essential to plan ahead. An impaired brain cannot be relied on to make healthy choices, and the level of impairment that affects your thinking happens quickly once you begin to drink. Plan to ride Late-Night Streamline.

If you drive to an event in the week between Christmas and New Year, AAA's Operation Topsy Tow will give you and your vehicle a free ride home.

Should you notice a driver already on the road that you suspect may be impaired, call 911. When you have information from an incident that is no longer in process, call a non-emergency number for your local police department. In Bozeman that's 582-2000. Truly, the life you save may be your own or that of someone you love.

Mark Allen is a citizen member of the Gallatin County DUI Taskforce.